

## REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

(Committee Rooms A/B - Neath Civic Centre)

**Members Present:**

**9 March 2018**

**Chairperson:** Councillor S.K.Hunt

**Councillors:** C.J.Jones, D.M.Peters, S.Pursey, S.Rahaman,  
O.S.Davies, R.W.Wood and H.Jones

**Officers In Attendance** S.Brennan, Ms.A.Spooner-Cleverly,  
B.Riseborough, J.Davies, Ms.N.Jones, R.Turner

**Cabinet Invitees:** Councillors D.W.Davies and E.V.Latham

**Observers** E. Bradfield

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### 1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**

Councillor Sean Pursey made a Declaration of Interest at the commencement of the meeting in relation to the report of the Head of Property and Regeneration on the Former Plaza Cinema, Port Talbot, because he is a member of the Plaza Community Group.

### 2. **MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 26TH JANUARY 2018**

Members noted the minutes from the previous meeting.

### 3. **MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 17TH JANUARY 2018**

Members noted the minutes from the previous Community Safety & Public Protection Scrutiny Sub Committee.

4. **SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.**

Members noted the scrutiny forward programme for 2017/18.

5. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

Cabinet Board Proposals

5.1 Rural Development Programme

The Committee received information in relation to the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 as contained within the circulated report.

Members questioned the criteria used when determining which areas were rural. Members also queried why Alltwen was not classified as rural. Officers informed Members that a numerical formula issued by the Welsh Government was used to determine which areas were rural. Officers added that the formula took into account the number of citizens residing within a ward and how sparsely they were distributed.

Members queried whether there were any examples of projects that had been supported by LEADER funding. Officers reported that the Working with Nature project which was assisted by the Authority's Countryside and Wildlife Team had received LEADER funding to launch the "The Gateway to the Black Mountain" project, which supported the communities of Cwmgors, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Brynamman and Tairgwaith to enlist volunteers to help with nature conservation activities. Members commented that the Working with Nature project had been a success in the community of Dyffryn Clydach.

Members raised concerns that some communities were finding it hard to access grant funding due to the complexity of the application process, while others were deterred by the length of time it took for the grant money to be released. Officers acknowledged the potential difficulties experienced during the application process and informed Members that the Local Action Group had two dedicated development workers to assist communities with each stage of the process. Officers informed Members that the application process had become more robust and streamlined, and that the average turnaround period for applications was now around six months.

Officers offered to provide advice and support to Members and their communities if they had any queries or issues.

Following scrutiny the Committee noted the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 update.

### 5.2 Former Plaza Cinema, Port Talbot

The Committee received information in relation to the Former Plaza Cinema, Port Talbot as contained within the circulated report.

Members raised concerns over the potential difficulty that the successful bidder may experience when attempting to find businesses to occupy the units, as the proposal was very prescriptive regarding the types of businesses desired. Members added that there were possible financial risks if the contract between the Authority and the chosen organisation was terminated early as a result, and the Authority had to pay to reconfigure the building for general use in order to appeal to more businesses.

Officers informed Members that the building would be designed with the flexibility to reconfigure the layout if required in the future. Officers explained that it was important to view the former Plaza Cinema within the context of the other regeneration activities which were taking place in the area. Officers added that it was important to have a good mix of businesses in the area.

Members questioned why the Authority did not wish to retain the operational management of the building as previously done with Sandfields Young Business Centre. Officers explained that it was a different proposition to Sandfields Young Business Centre, and had the potential to provide a steady income stream which would keep it financially viable. Officers stated that there were businesses in the private sector that were better suited at running the building than the Authority due to their experience and expertise.

Members queried what the timescales were for the project. Officers informed Members that the procurement stage was due for completion by the end of the year, and that the successful bidder would be on site by next year. Officers added that the project would be progressed as quickly as practicable in order to capitalise on the European grant funding before it became unavailable following Brexit.

Members emphasised the importance of regularly monitoring progress, and queried how Local Members would still be involved in the process. Officers stated that any updates on developments would

be reported regularly to the Committee, Plaza Community Group and directly to Local Members.

Members acknowledged the progress made on the project to date, and following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

## 6. **ACCESS TO MEETINGS**

### **RESOLVED**

that pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the above Act.

## 7. **PRE-SCRUTINY**

The Committee chose to scrutinise the following items:

### **Cabinet Board Proposals**

#### **7.1 Private Urgency Action – Sale of Former Hafod Care Home**

The Committee received information on the urgency action in relation to the sale of the former Hafod Care Home, Wenham Place, Neath as contained within the circulated report.

Officers explained that there was an error in the report under the Workforce Impact heading. Officers stated that there were no workforce impacts associated with the report.

Following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

#### **7.2 Port Talbot Peripheral Distributor Road Phase II – Network Rail**

The Committee received information in relation to the Port Talbot Peripheral Distributor Road Phase Two – Network Rail as contained within the circulated report.

Following scrutiny the Committee were supportive of the proposals to be considered at Cabinet Board.

### 7.3 Land at Waun Sterw, Pontardawe

The Committee received information in relation to the sale of vacant land at Waun Sterw, Pontardawe as contained within the circulated report.

Members queried whether it would have been possible to have negotiated a higher price per plot. Officers informed Members that the price was considered to be reasonable, particularly as the developer was also responsible for putting the infrastructure in place. Officers stated that it was usually difficult to attract developers to rural areas as they preferred locations on the coastal belt or town/city areas where projects were more lucrative.

Members questioned whether the land to the front of the plot was also in Council ownership, and if so, whether the developer would be interested in taking on this piece of land also. Officers explained that they would check whether the land was in Council ownership and report back to Members.

## **CHAIRPERSON**